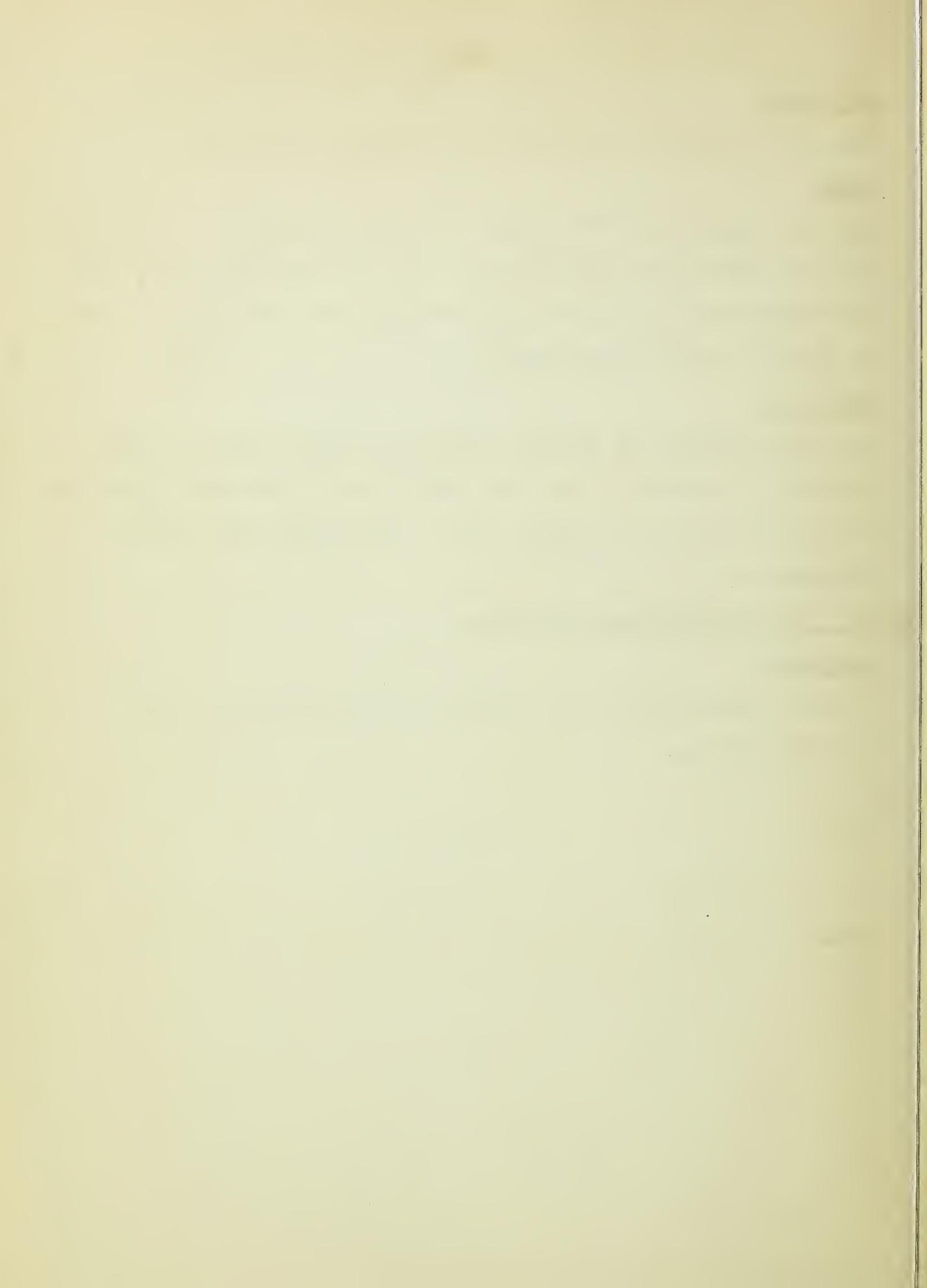


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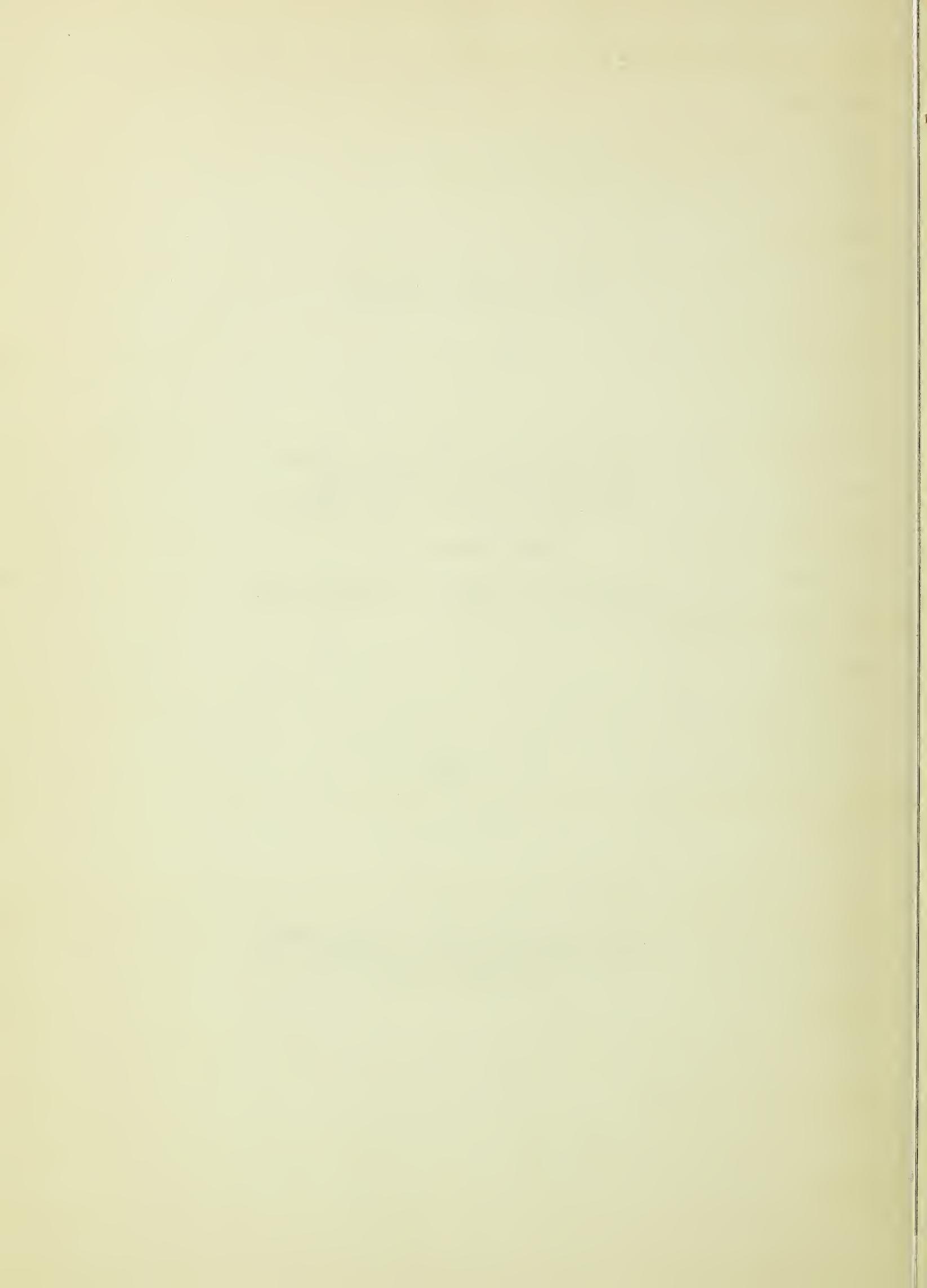
"BLUE RIBBON FARMING"

Broadcast No. 24 in a series
of discussions of soil con-
servation in the Ohio Valley.

WLW, Cincinnati

October 8, 1938 6:00-6:15 p.m.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
Dayton, Ohio



SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

Near Jonesboro, Tennessee, an early American pioneer scrawled the crude legend, "D. Boone killed a bar in this tree 1769." Daniel Boone had never heard of soil erosion, for forests of beech, oak, poplar, and walnut blanketed Tennessee's Hills. But today, clean-tilled crops--corn, cotton, tobacco are the state's chief agricultural products, and soil erosion one of its chief agricultural problems. This is the story of Charles Bidwell, of Davidson County, who found out a long time ago what to do about the erosion problem...

SOUND: Man driving nails into board.

BIDWELL

By gosh, it takes a long time to build a house, 'specially when you have to run the farm too. Think I'll have a smoke.

SOUND: (after pause) Striking match, puffing on pipe.

BIDWELL

Folks can't say I don't grow good tobacco, though.

MARY KATE (fading in)

Don't look like you're gettin' much done, Charles.

BIDWELL

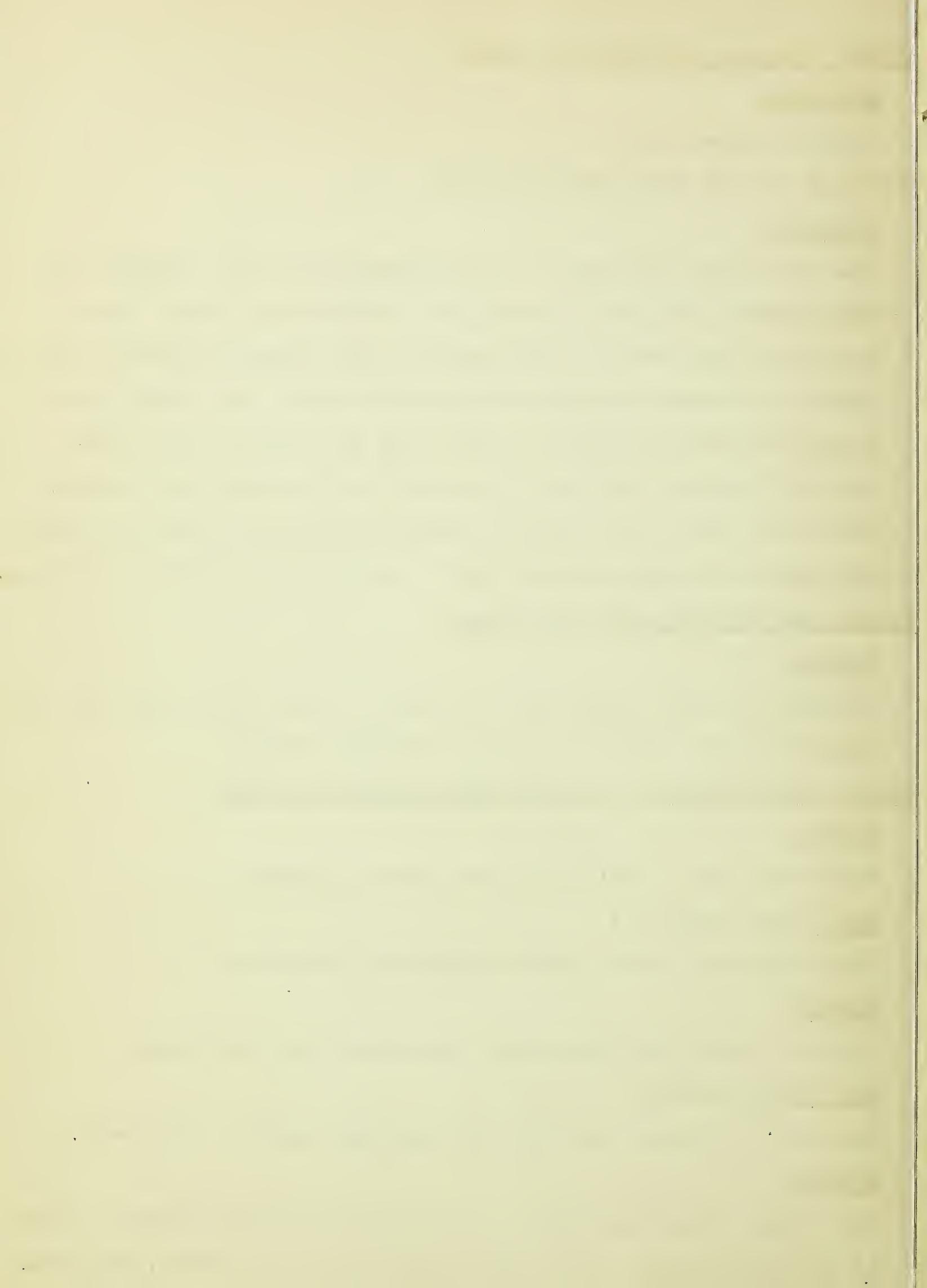
Oh, that heifer got loose while ago and got into the corn.

MARY KATE (teasing)

Now that's too bad, isn't it? Bet you sure hated to stop work.

BIDWELL

Darn right I did, Mary Kate. I wanna get this house finished before it gets any colder. Gotta have a nice house for a bride, you know.



MARY KATE

It is going to be nice. The whole farm's nice, too.

BIDWELL

Yeah, I guess it's just about the best one around here. Ought to be. Never been cultivated before we came here last year.

MARY KATE

How long do you think it'll last--I mean, before it'll wear out like some of the other farms around here?

BIDWELL

Wear out? Mary Kate, this is one farm that'll never wear out!

ORGAN:

SOUND: Team of mules dragging plow.

T. J.

Guess I'm plumb crazy, or you are, Charley. But I sure don't see much sense in these crooked rows.

BIDWELL

Most of the neighbors feel the same way, T. J. We got to do something about this soil washing. Been farming this land not quite four years and some of the slopes are washing like the devil.

T. J.

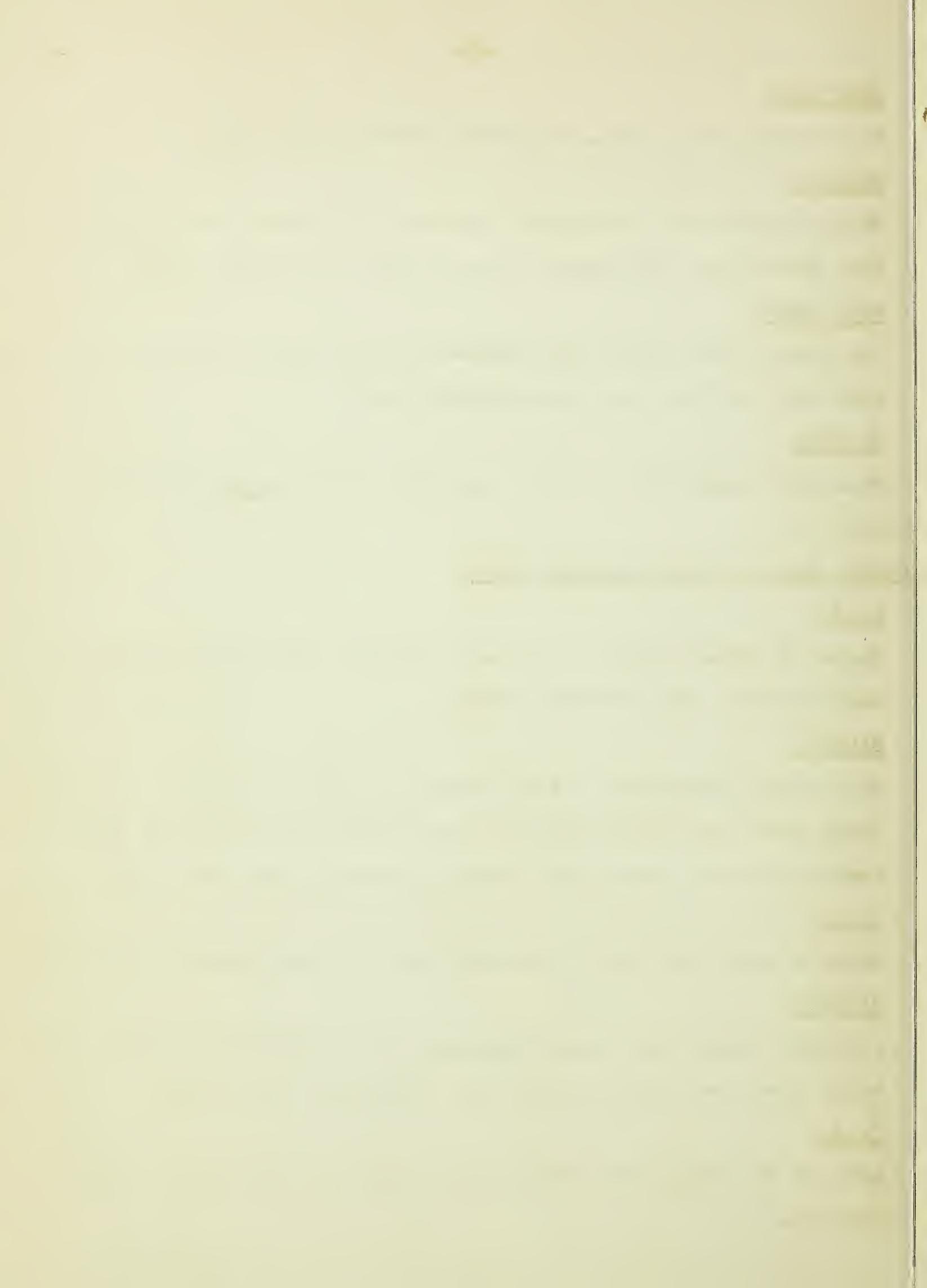
Yeah, I know. Why don't you build some of those hillside ditches?

BIDWELL

I thought about it. An old neighbor of ours over by the home place built some more than 50 years ago. Felts, his name was.

T. J.

Lots of the folks think those ditches are the only way to stop erosion.



BIDWELL

I know, but heap of my land is so steep and rolling it's kinda hard to build one of those ditches, or terraces some folks call them. But I say there's more'n one way to skin a cat.

T. J.

Well, you're darn sure skinnin' this one plumb to blazes. Winding rows around the hill.

BIDWELL

Whoa! Let's stop a minute.

SOUND: Mules stop.

BIDWELL

Now, look there across that draw. See those rows going up and down hill?

T. J.

Ought to know 'em by heart. Plowed 'em that way for three years myself.

BIDWELL

Anybody can see that rows up and down hill wash.

T. J.

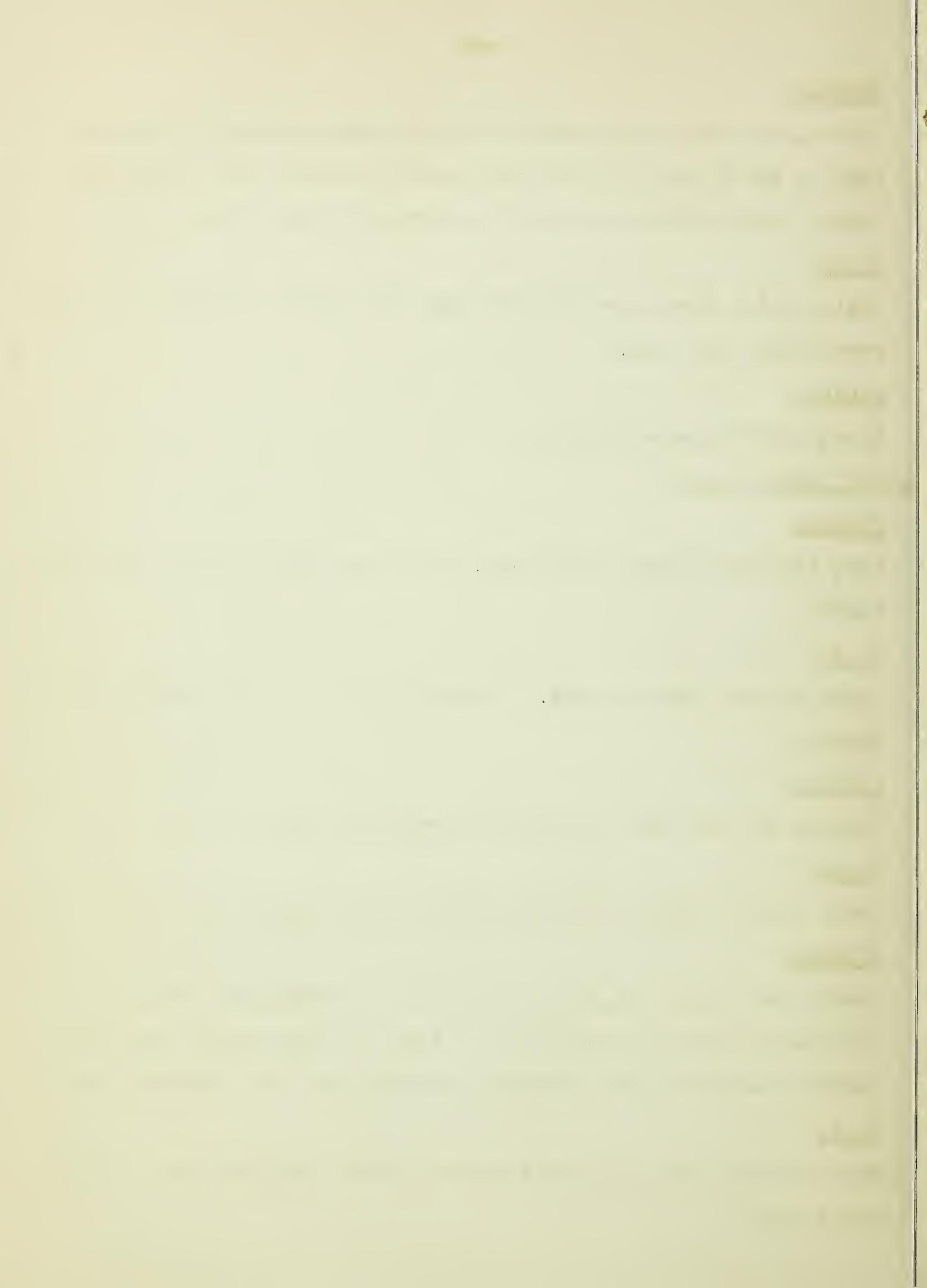
Yeah, they do sorta act like gutters, don't they?

BIDWELL

That's the idea. Now, these rows may be crooked, but they're on the level, and once you get on to 'em, I figure you'll find that they're easier to plow, because you won't have any up-hill pull.

T. J.

Some of those steeper slopes will be pretty hard to plow, though, won't they?



BIDWELL

We're not going to plow them. I told you that there's more than one way to skin a cat, and there's more'n one way to stop this soil washing. Terraces are all right for some fields. This plowing on the level is all right for a lot more. But now that east eighty is too rough and hummocky for any kind of cultivation.

T. J.

I hate to see you let it lie idle, though. Why don't you plow it until it does wear out? Least you'll get a few years' crops off'in it.

BIDWELL

I'm going to get more than a few years out of it. I'm going to make a permanent meadow out of that eighty. Well, this isn't getting this field plowed. Get up!

SOUND: Mules dragging plow.

T. J.

I guess I'm beginning to catch on, after seeing these rows and those up-and-down hill rows over there...but...ain't they the crookedest rows you ever saw!

ORGAN:

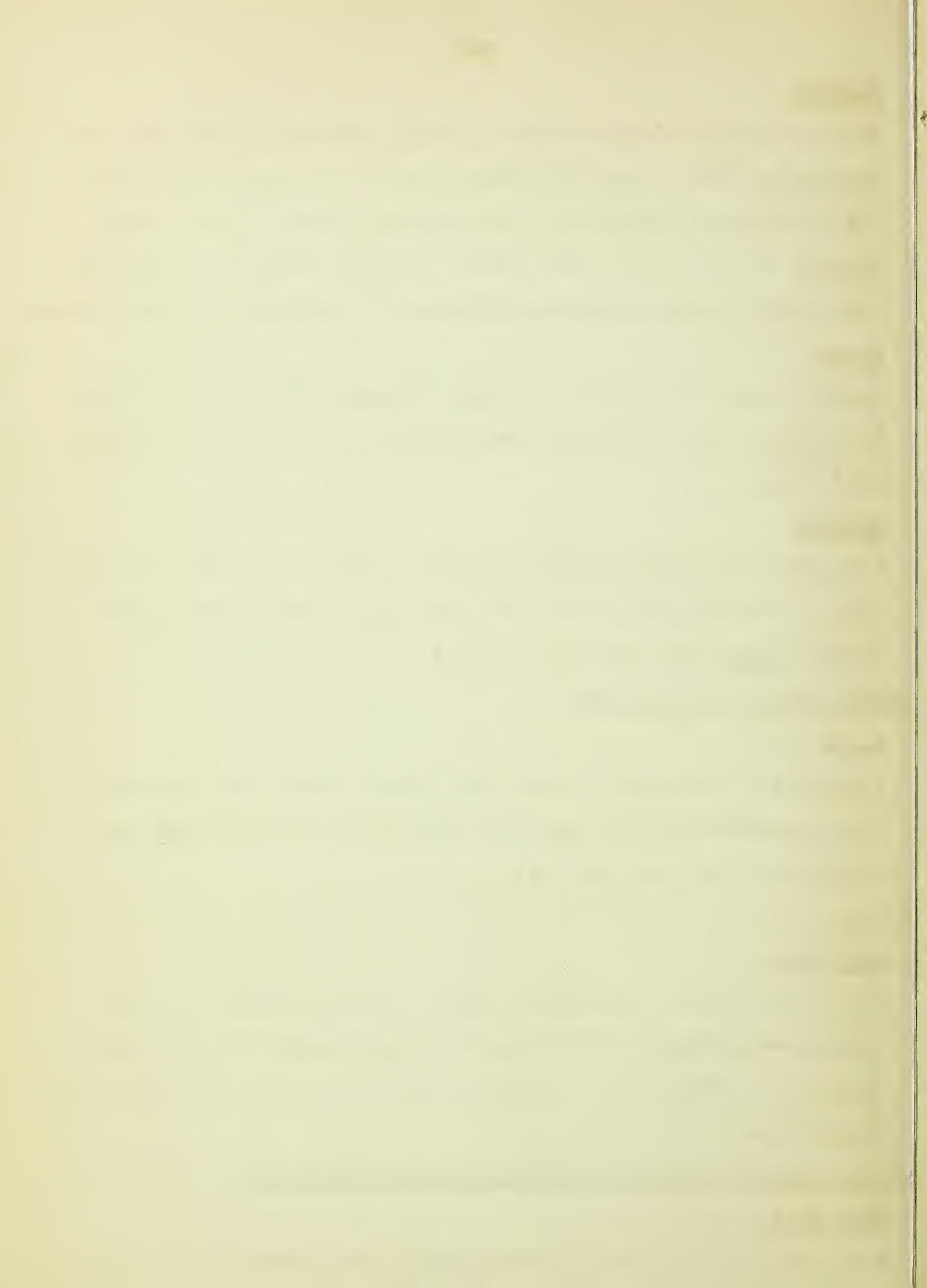
ANNOUNCER

Thus, more than 30 years ago, Charles Bidwell adopted contour tillage--a method of cultivation now used by American farmers on millions of acres. And in 1936, at the state fair in Nashville, Tennessee...

SOUND: Fair and carnival noises, merry-go-round, etc.

MARY KATE

My, I had no idea there would be such a big crowd.



BIDWELL

This is one of the best fairs they've ever had, I reckon.

MARY KATE

We've had a good year on the farm, too.

BIDWELL

Well, give credit to the land. It's good land.

T. J.

Hello, folks!

MARY KATE

Hello, T. J.

BIDWELL

Imagine running into you in all this crowd.

T. J.

I'm going over to the tobacco judging.

MARY KATE

Oh, you have an entry, don't you?

T. J.

Yes, and it's the best there, let me tell you. (Chuckles) And we grew it on that contour-plowed land, too.

BIDWELL

Well, let's go along and see how many prizes you carry away.

T. J.

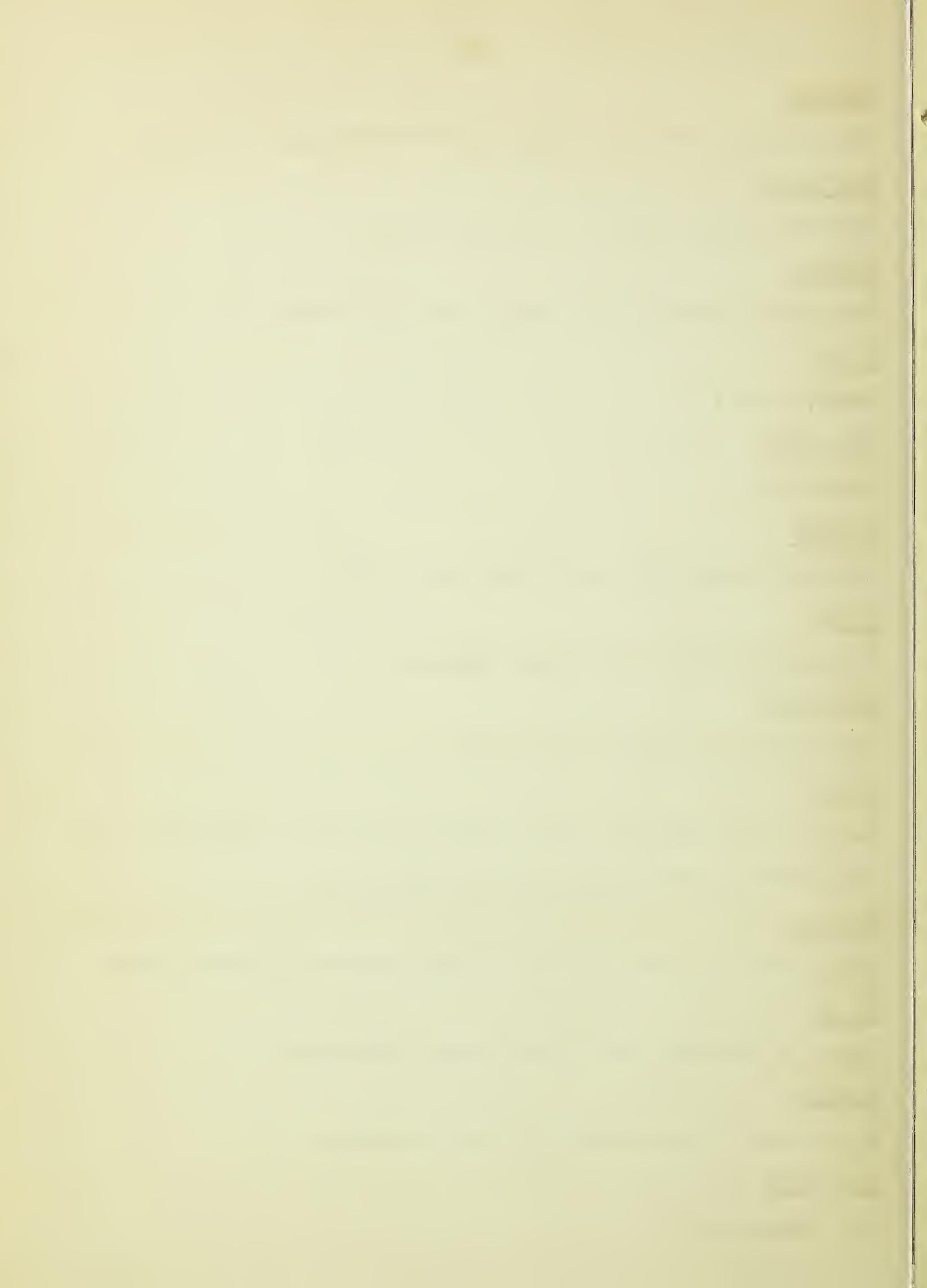
Fine. We sure did have good tobacco this year.

BIDWELL

Wonderful. I was talking to Oscar Ferris...

MARY KATE

The county agent?



BIDWELL

Yes. He says that our farm tobacco yield was more than twice the county average this year. You know what that means, don't you, T. J.?

T. J.

Why....that'll mean that my tenant's share will be more than the average farmer will get. That won't make me mad!

BIDWELL (laughing)

No, I guess not.

MARY KATE

Doesn't make me mad, either. Charley's made money every year since we've been married.

BIDWELL

And you've helped spend it! (all laugh)

BIDWELL

That contour plowing that everybody laughed at had a lot to do with it. The neighbors are plowing that way too, now.

T. J.

Here's the building.

SOUND: Carnival noises gradually fade as they enter building, and hubbub of conversation comes in.

T. J.

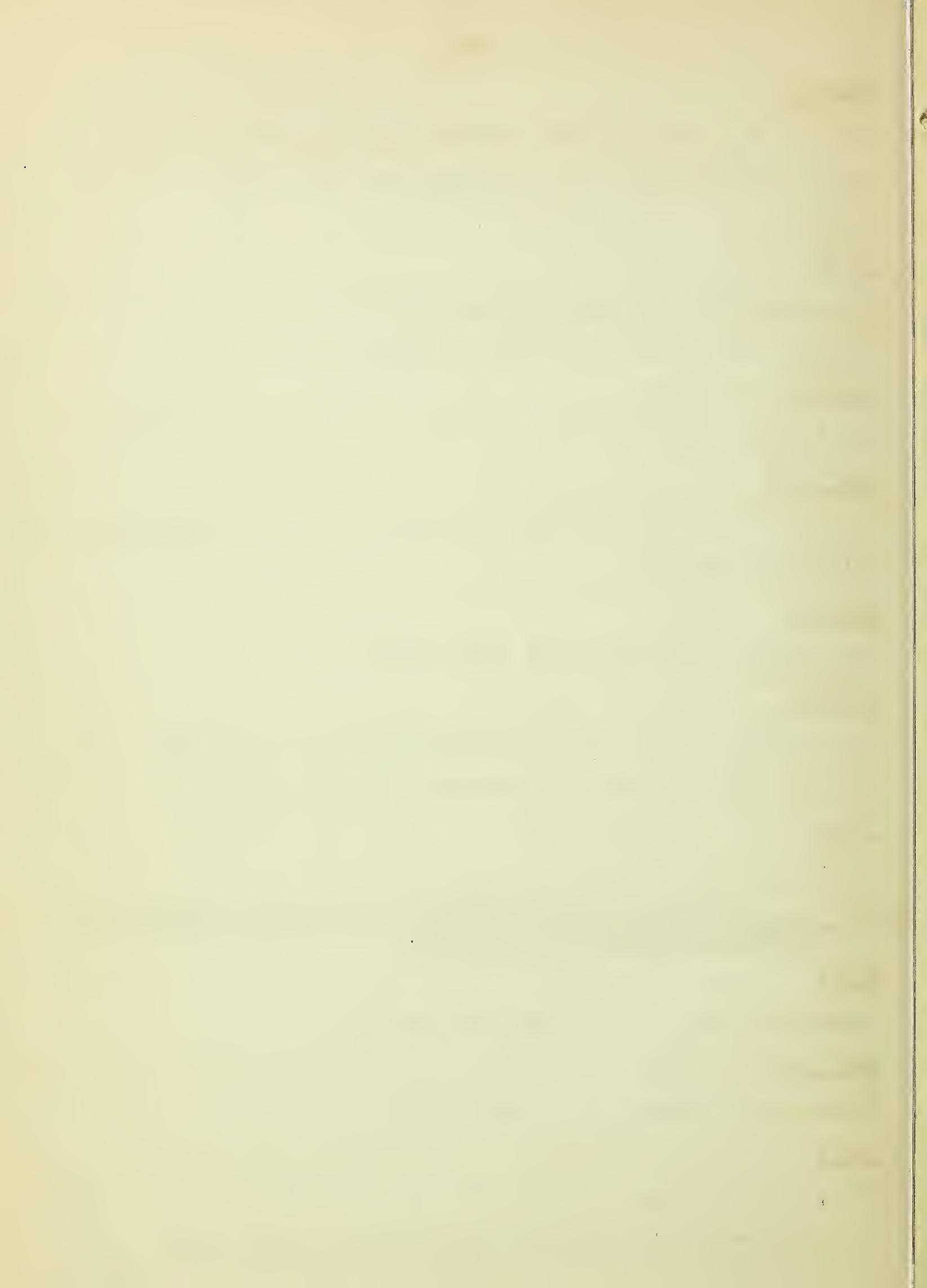
We must be late. They're already judging.

MARY KATE

Do you really think you'll win, T. J.?

T. J.

Well, I don't know. If I do, I'm going to give contour cultivation the credit--but I'll keep the money myself! (all laugh)



BIDWELL

I guess I can give contour plowing the credit for me being nominated for Master Farmer, too.

MARY KATE

Ssh! There's the judge coming out now!

SOUND: Hubbub and conversation stop.

JUDGE

First prize! Dark-fired tobacco! Grown by T. J. Williams, on the Charles Bidwell farm, Davidson County!

SOUND: Cheers and applause.

T. J.

We won, Charley! Good old contour tobacco!

ORGAN:

ANNOUNCER

Thus Charles Bidwell, of Davidson County, Tennessee, received another award for his careful farm planning...planning that has brought a profit every year for more than thirty years...planning that has kept his topsoil pinned to the ground...planning that has made his farm near Nashville one of the most productive and progressive in Middle Tennessee.

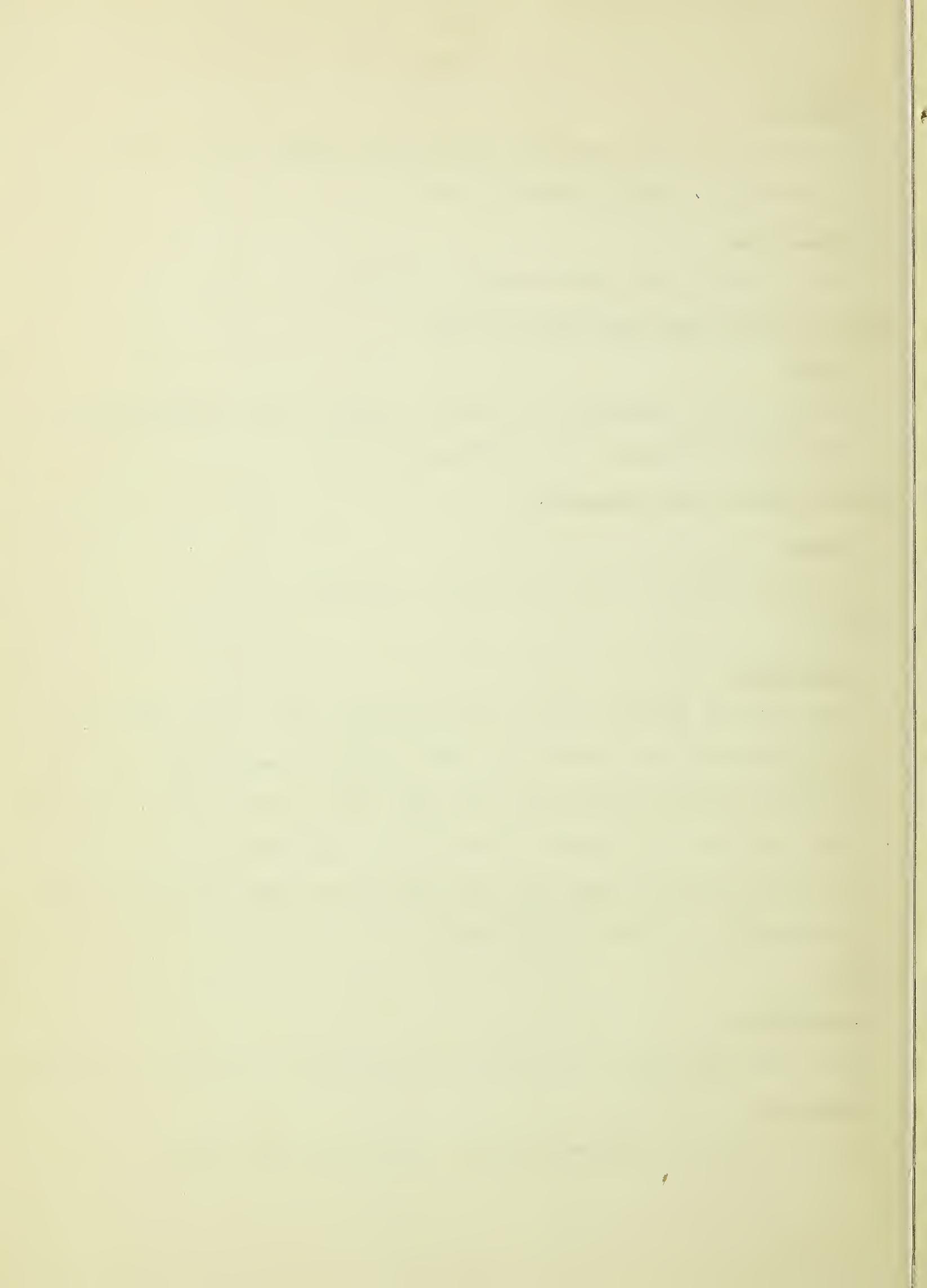
ORGAN:

ANNOUNCER

And now, Gene Charles of the Soil Conservation Service, at Dayton.

CHARLES

Is that all the build-up I get? Thanks just the same.



ANNOUNCER

Well, Gene, perhaps that was a rather abrupt introduction, but seriously, I thought that the Bidwell story was a pleasant way of getting into the subject for the day, which, I can tell at a glance, is contour tillage. Naturally, we were looking for you to supply the balance of the story.

CHARLES

All right, I'll do part of it, but I'm going to call on a rather mild-mannered gentleman from Illinois to help me out. But before we tackle the task of getting him to talk, I'd like to say that we still have copies of the bulletin on cover crops for distribution.

ANNOUNCER

That's surprising, in a way. I remember you telling me that the cover crops bulletin was the most popular you have offered on the air.

CHARLES

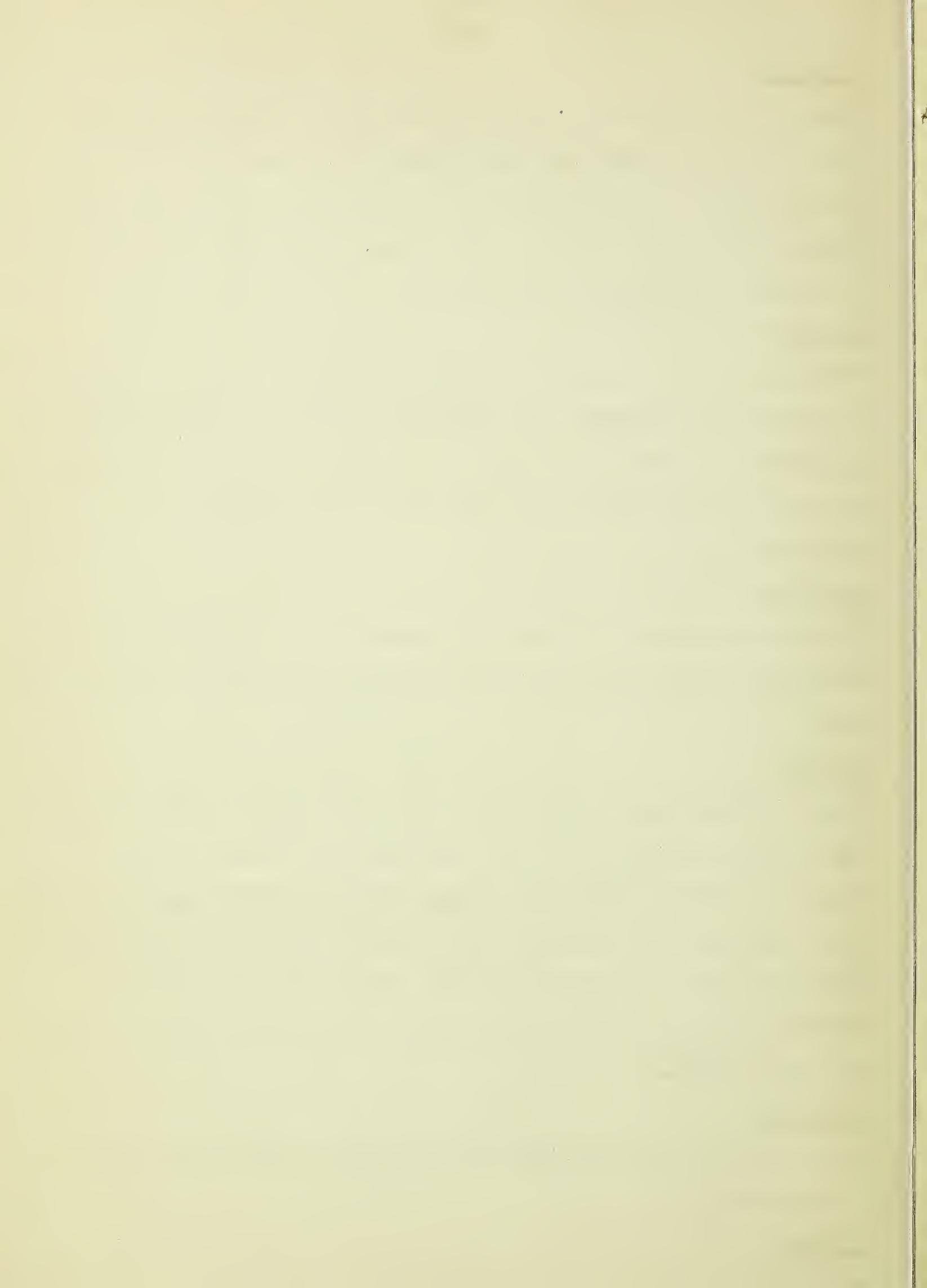
Well, probably one reason is because it's timely. We've offered "Anchoring Farmlands," "Conserving Corn Belt Soil," "Strip Cropping," "What is Soil Erosion," "Forest Farming" ...oh, I can't name them all right now, but the requests for "Cover Crops" are still pouring in, so I thought I'd mention the fact that the bulletin can be secured by dropping a card to Soil Conservation, at Dayton, Ohio.

ANNOUNCER

I'm sure that a lot of folks will be glad to know that. Shall I repeat that?

CHARLES

Sure, echo it again.



ANNOUNCER

Copies of the bulletin, "Cover Crops for Soil Conservation," may be secured by writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio.

CHARLES

Oh, yes, and I might add that most of the state agricultural colleges have published localized bulletins on the same subject, and, of course, any county agricultural agent can give you first-hand information on what types of cover crops are suitable. But we're getting away from the subject...

ANNOUNCER

And your guest is getting toward the microphone...

CHARLES

...you can see that he's just bubbling over with information, so I'll get right down to brass tacks and introduce him. Mr. L. R. Combs, of the Soil Conservation Service in Des Moines, Iowa. The Des Moines office, just to clarify the point, supervises the soil erosion control work in the upper Mississippi region which includes Iowa. And while we're talking about contour tillage, we're talking about Illinois. Isn't that right, Les Combs?

COMBS

Well, since you say I'm bubbling over with information, I will say that Illinois has taken to contour cultivation in a big way.

CHARLES

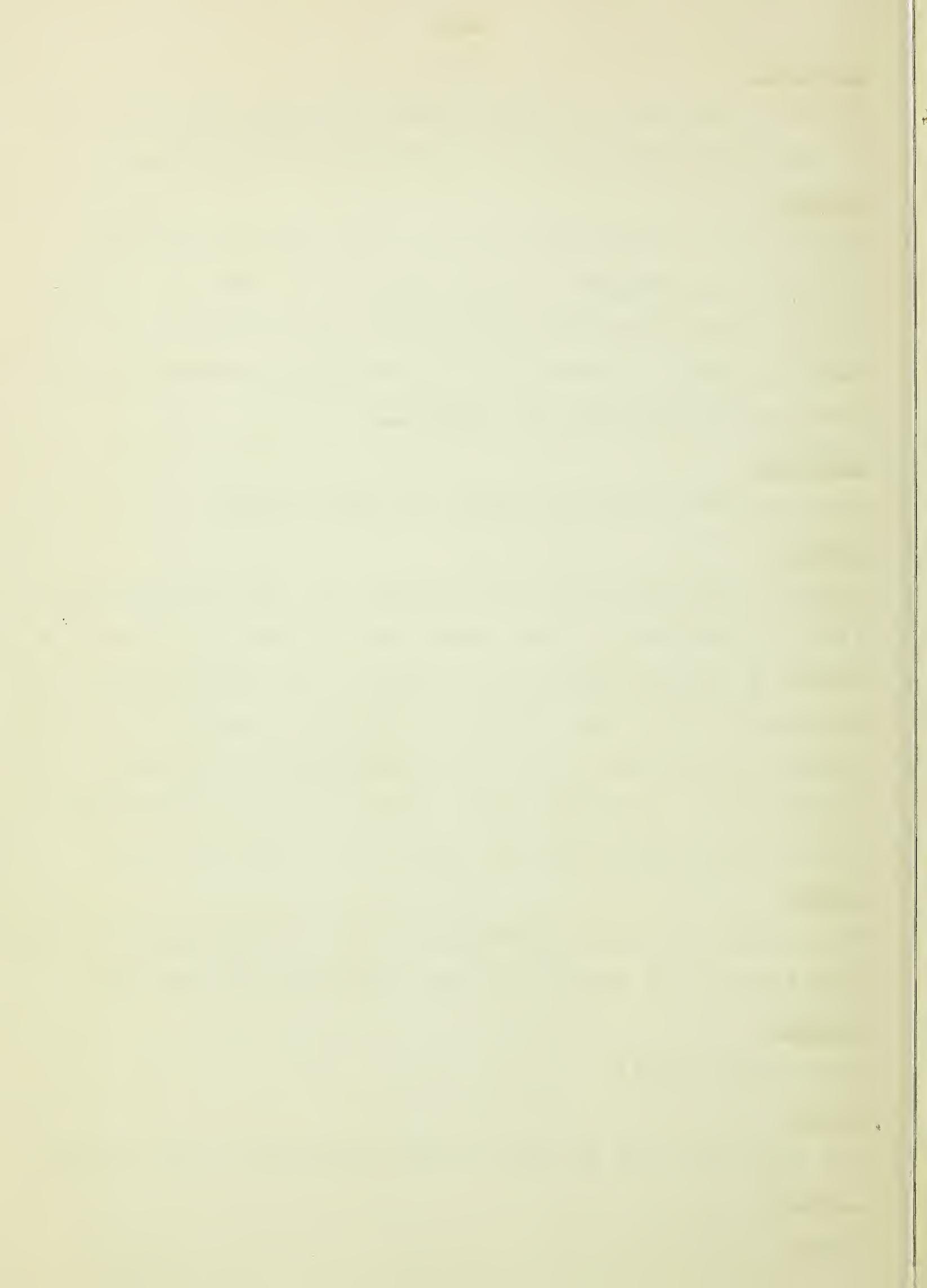
And to what extent?

COMBS

I'd rather not bore you with figures. How about a few examples?

CHARLES

Fine.



COMBS

Well, I hardly know where to start. Maybe I'd better start with a rain, because that's where your soil erosion starts.

CHARLES

I thought that soil erosion started when we cleared the trees from steep slopes and plowed up the sod.

COMBS

Oh, all right. I'll admit that that is where the trouble originally started. Well, we had one of the wettest spring seasons in recent history. And the rains were often intense-- some as much as one inch in 10 minutes.

CHARLES

That is a slight sprinkle.

COMBS

Felix Pinkstaff, one of our cooperators near Lawrenceville, reports that a 40-acre contoured cornfield with contour buffer strips suffered very little erosion. But a field on a nearby farm, without erosion control practices, was badly washed.

CHARLES

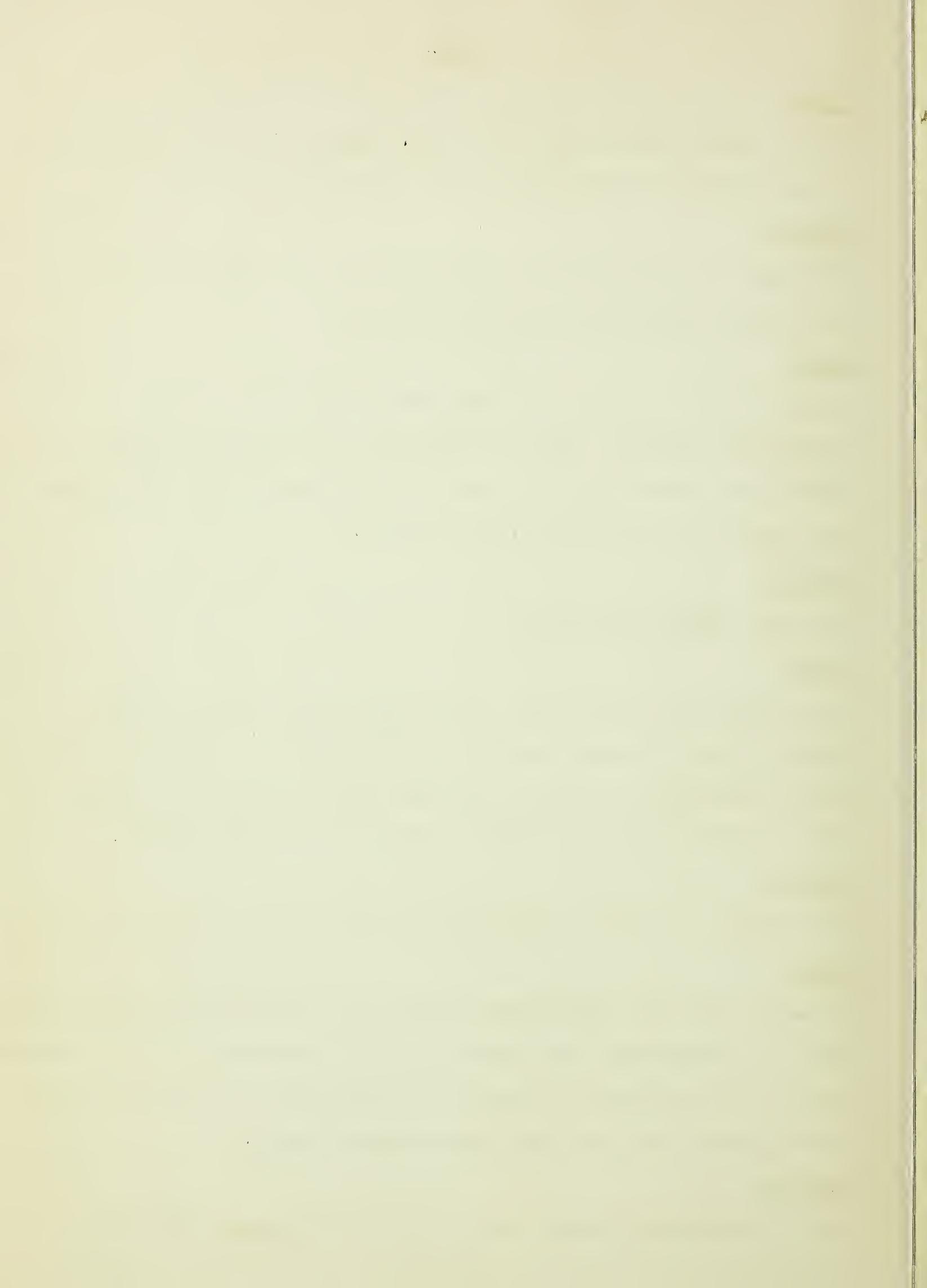
How badly?

COMBS

So badly that the neighboring fields were gashed with gullies that had to be plowed in. But that's just one example. On the Sickbert farms near Edwardsville, whose farm plans include contour cultivation, practically no soil washing was evident.

CHARLES

And on neighboring farms, soil erosion was plenty evident?



COMBS

That's right, Gene. You talk like you've been there. Anyhow, the corn had to be replanted on neighboring farms because so much of the surface soil was swept right off the field.

CHARLES

You know, Les, your remark there gave me an idea. Soil erosion is just like a hungry boy licking the icing off a layer cake.

COMBS

Except that when you eat the icing, you still have good cake left. But when the topsoil is gone, you won't get 50-bushel corn from subsoil.

CHARLES

And soil washed into the creek grows no corn either. Well, we're getting away from the subject of contour tillage a little, although soil erosion control and contour tillage do go hand in hand.

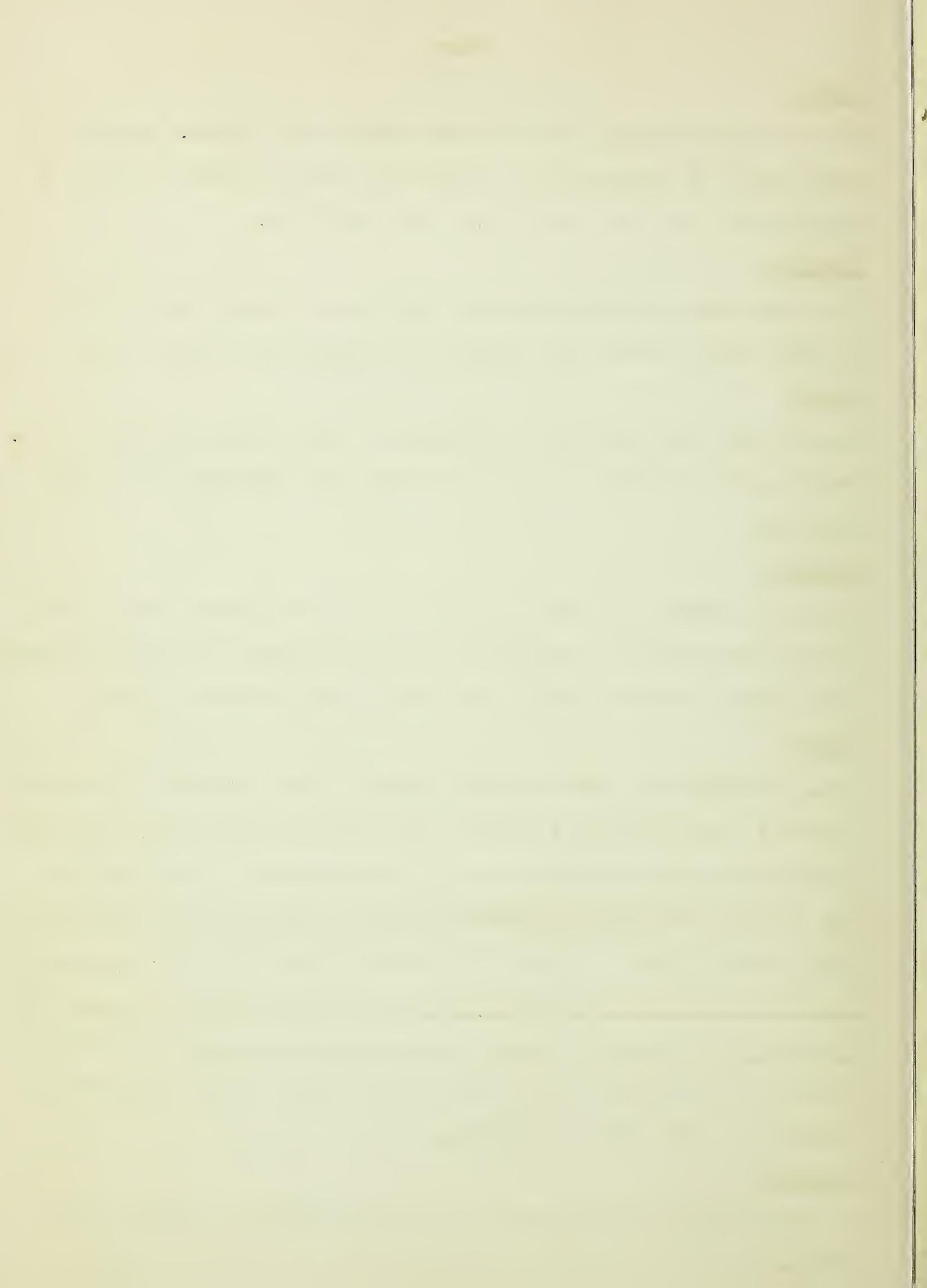
COMBS

Yes, you might say that contour tillage is the keystone of erosion control. Louis Klotz, a farmer near O'Fallon, Illinois, will tell you that contour tillage pays. He drilled part of his wheat on the contour, and part up-and-down hill. When the rains came, he sure found out that contour cultivation holds the soil.

_____ and _____ and
_____ had the same experiences. Well, Gene, I could name farmer after farmer that is changing to this type of farming.

CHARLES

In other words, square farming in round country is going out of style.



COMBS

Yes, curves seem to be the fashion for rolling land. And that, Gene, goes for Illinois.

CHARLES

And let me add hurriedly, that that goes for the Ohio Valley region, too. Our Ohio and Indiana and Kentucky farmers are taking to contour tillage just as rapidly. And thank you, L. R. Combs, of the Soil Conservation Service regional office of Des Moines, Iowa. And let me add a salute to your farmers in Illinois for demonstrating that contour cultivation does save the soil.

ANNOUNCER

Gene, may I add a salute?

CHARLES

Why, certainly, Corporal _____.

ANNOUNCER

A salute to those who have written for the bulletin on cover crops, and to those who haven't written, copies of the bulletin, "Cover Crops for Soil Conservation," may be secured by writing to Soil Conservation, Dayton, Ohio. Next week, work on public lands...

SOUND: Thunder, followed by rain.

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away is an educational presentation of the Nation's Station.

